

U.S.

Independence Day

By MICHAEL JAY FRIEDMAN

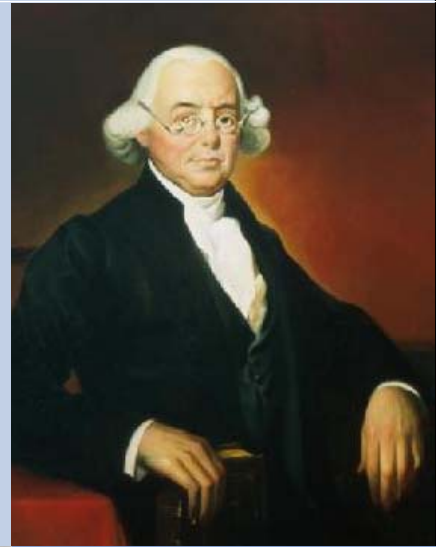
A Civic and Social Event

The United States celebrates its Independence Day on July 4, a day of patriotic celebration and family events throughout the country. In the words of Founding Father John Adams, the holiday is "the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance...It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forever more."

The holiday is a major civic occasion,

On July 4, 1852, the black journalist and abolitionist Frederick Douglass decried the evils of slavery, still prevalent in the American South at that time, but identified forces "drawing encouragement from the Declaration of Independence, the great principles it contains, and the genius of American Institutions in operation" that "must inevitably work the downfall of slavery."

Ninety years later, in the darkest moments of World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt reminded the nation



Above: Founding Father James Wilson.

The Washington Monument (far left), Erie Canal (left) and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (below) all broke ground on Independence Day.

Left below: Seth Eason is surrounded by flags at the July Fourth parade at Southport, North Carolina.



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Courtesy Library of Congress

with roots deep in the Anglo-American tradition of political freedom.

Construction of important public works sometimes begins on July 4. The Erie Canal, Washington Monument and Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (the nation's first) all broke ground on Independence Day. The date reflects a desire symbolically to stamp these projects as true civic improvements.

The Fourth of July also is a time when elected officials and other public figures give speeches extolling American traditions and values.

On July 4, 1788, Founding Father James Wilson addressed a gathering in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, that was, at that time, possibly the largest July 4 celebration in the young nation's history. He exhorted his fellow citizens to ratify the proposed Constitution. "What is the object exhibited to our contemplation?" he asked. "A whole people exercising its first and greatest power—performing an act of sovereignty, original and unlimited..."

that July 4 symbolized "the democratic freedom which our citizens claim as their precious birthright."

On July 4, 2001, President George W. Bush spoke outside Independence Hall, Philadelphia, the birthplace of the Declaration of Independence. That document, he said, continues to represent "the standard to which we hold others, and the standard by which we measure ourselves. Our greatest achievements have come when we have lived up to these ideals. Our greatest tragedies have come when we have failed to uphold them."



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